From: John Brajkovic
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/29/02 12:30am
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

Hi,

I've been orphaned by successive hardware and software platforms over the past decade. My comments will emphasize the time period 1989-1993.

Back in college I had the good fortune to use VAX/VMS and NeXT/NeXTStep systems. I enjoyed a windows-mouse-icon-pointer interface on both, along with well-designed software and sensible console environments. Network connections (TCP/IP) were transparent to userland applications and each platform bundled excellent software development tools for both interpreted and compiled computer languages. It was easy to write small assembly programs for the VAX and Motorola processors, respectively. Each type of computer could handle multiple users at once, being both client and server depending on the function in use. Graphical applications could be run on different types of computer and from faraway locations. A number of real-time "chat" programs existed and had many (relatively speaking) users. Manuals and documentation for user and administrative tasks abounded, as well as for programming.

Unfortunately I also had to use "desktop" computers. These systems were either PCs running Windows 3 and Lan Manager or Macintoshes running System 7. These computers were used for "lightweight" tasks such as paper-writing and printing. They did not work well for their assigned tasks. Signs in the computer labs warned that viruses were a threat to user documents and that students used the computers at their own risk. Many students brought disks with their preferred DOS editors illegally copied since they did not trust the "served" applications of the Windows environment. Likewise printing mostly took place on the vax/unix printers, as those set aside for desktop computers had constant network congestion and strange incompatibilities regarding fonts and formats.

Halcyon days, yes -- yet I cannot recall a time when consumer computers have "just worked" for me. Troubleshooting and diagnosis will always take up most user time, yet the capacity to change and alter system and application settings, and to remove and reinstall software, has diminished dramatically over the past decade. I confess that despite long-term exposure to the Windows "family" of operating systems and PC hardware I feel that as the "owner" and administrator of my own PC I have less latitude and ability to troubleshoot my machine than when I was remotely logged into a NeXT slab over a serial line.

My PC shipped with Windows 98. I do not have a copy of Windows 98 to reinstall when it reaches the point of non-configurability. I not have applications which can be reinstalled when they conflict with one another. Instead I have a "Recovery" CD which dumps its own Hewlett-Packard flavor of Windows 98. Its HP-specific drivers cannot be disentangled from the core OS. I cannot cleanly install, remove and reinstall applications. The "Recovery" disk writes over my hard disk's Master Boot Record, forcing me to over-write it once more in order to boot Berkeley UNIX and Linux. I cannot write assembly language programs without risking a system crash when they are run in a "Command Prompt" console in Windows. I had to replace the default sound card, as Hewlett-Packard chose to add wiring directly

from the power supply to said card, causing frequent system lockups -- a problem solved
by removal of the "HP sound solution". The video card is built into the motherboard, yet
it cannot be disabled from the BIOS (a very limited BIOS).

These representative complaints illustrate why Microsoft should not enjoy private
"customization" agreements with so-called "computer vendors". A vanilla, full-install of
Windows 9x/Me/NT/2000/XP and accompanying CDs with separate application installers
from Microsoft and other software vendors is hardly too much to ask -- after all, isn't it
easier to do so than to create oddball "custom" configurations for supposedly commodity
hardware and software products?

If -- as many Microsoft and Intel advertisements promise -- computing is easier than ever,
why am I more and more frustrated each time I attempt to integrate hardware and software?
Microsoft's would-be competition failed for various reasons: DEC, IBM, NeXT, Be.
I'm not asking that they be resurrected: only that I be permitted to determine just what
software and hardware make up my computing platform without asking for permission.
I took advantage of a sales deal to buy a PC from CompUSA. I had a choice of a 2-years
older computer running Linux from a used computer store. Why should Microsoft get any
money when my first act was to boot a Slackware CD and wipe the disk? (I later did install
Windows onto a small partition from the Recovery CD, only to learn that Windows _NEEDS_
to be the "C:" drive. 15 years of DOS and it still can't handle being moved to slave position.)

I have no problem buying a separate, full-install of Windows. I have no problem running
"Windows" applications. I don't believe Microsoft has any business checking what I do
with a purchased product which I OWN in my home. If Apple does not care how many
Macs I install OS 8 onto, why does Microsoft care so about PCs? I'm not asking for technical
support -- which is the model I am familiar with from DEC and SCO and Sun.

Apologies for the rambling nature of this post.   Thank you for reading it.

John Brajkovic

PS. Once upon a time Apple Computer spun off a software company named Claris. (Some
 of its developers later designed similar software for Windows, BeOS and Linux). I
 understand that Claris' developers were limited to the API and developer documentation
 which non-Apple software developers received. Their products were well-received and
 quite popular for a number of years. I fail to see why Microsoft should not do the same.